

Chronicles of Food Protection

www.vdacs.state.va.us/fdsafety

November 2004

Greetings Food Industry! We've weathered a wet summer and survived the brunt of hurricane season. Now we look forward to the holiday season. Food safety and security have never been more important. Read on for important and helpful information on food security, food safety, and current and upcoming events within the VDACS' Food Safety and Security Program.

Food Security

It has never been more important to protect the nation's food supply. According to an October 1, 2004 article in *Directions Magazine*, news reports indicate that terrorists have developed materials to manufacture *Salmonella* and *Botulinum* and intend to poison the food supply. Therefore, it is crucial that we continue to strengthen our food supply surveillance systems and improve communication and coordination among local, state, and federal agencies, as well as the food industry, to heighten the ability to recognize and quickly respond to food-borne outbreaks.¹ By implementing food security measures in your food establishment that not only require more vigilance on your part, but also on the part of your suppliers and distributors, you can begin to create a positive food security domino effect in food establishments in Virginia and around the nation.

Don't wait until something bad happens to exchange or obtain contact information that may be needed in the event of a food-borne outbreak, whether it is terrorist related or not. Make sure that you and the responsible parties within your establishment have up-to-date contact information for the VDACS Food Safety and Security Program; state and local police; state and local health departments, if necessary; suppliers and distributors in the event of a recall; and in-house contact information so that efforts can be coordinated within your establishment and/or corporation.

By requiring your suppliers to provide food and ingredients from an approved source, to deliver your supplies in a locked and securely sealed vehicle, and to show proper identification upon arrival at your

establishment, you make it necessary for them to incorporate these food security measures into their own establishments.

Then, you can require that shipments be checked against invoices upon arrival by one of your employees, which means that loading dock doors will be kept locked unless they are attended, food deliveries are supervised, and products are evaluated upon receipt.

You can extend the effect even further by requiring your distributors to maintain control of your product at all times by storing it in secure locations, not leaving the products unattended, and delivering the products in sealed vehicles. Simply by requiring a little more of your suppliers, your employees, and your distributors, you will have expanded the concept and application of food security to other members of the food industry.

Recent Events

In early August 2004, the USDA received a security tip that approximately 200,000 pounds of lemons on a ship off the coast of New York might be biologically contaminated. The U.S. Coast Guard delayed the ship from port for about a week. Upon boarding the ship to inspect the lemons, no contamination was found. However, by this time the lemons had spoiled and had to be destroyed.

It is difficult to detain perishable cargo that is suspected of contamination, inspect it, and determine its disposition in a manner timely enough to still maintain the product's integrity. Professionals from the restaurant and food industries, as well as representatives from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Homeland Security, and other federal agencies responsible for keeping food safe hosted a meeting on security in June 2004.

The result of the meeting was a "common sense" checklist for U.S. companies to use when receiving food shipments. A few items on this list are:

- Thoroughly inspect all incoming food containers and food storage areas;
- Ask for tamper-resistant packaging from the supplier; and
- Train employees to spot suspicious shipments.²

2002 Bioterrorism Act—Registration

Our office still receives questions on the registration requirement of the Bioterrorism Act of 2002. We encourage you to visit FDA's Registration web site for details on how to register your facility, what types of establishments are exempt from registering, and other questions you may have relative to the registration process. The web site is <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~furl/ovffreg.html>, and offers a wealth of information.

Food Safety

Well, hurricane season is coming to an end. What a year it has been so far in Virginia for rain! Parts of the state have really been affected by flood waters. If this has been the case in your area and your firm operates on well water, it may be necessary to disinfect your well.

Disinfecting Flooded Wells

If your well has been flooded, it may be contaminated with bacteria, viruses, or parasites which can cause illness. Water from a flooded well cannot be regarded as safe for drinking or food preparation until the well and plumbing system have been flushed and disinfected, and a water test shows that it is safe.

You can perform a simple disinfection of most types of private wells yourself by following the step-by-step instructions at the following web site: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/emergency/natural/floods/wells.html>. If you are uncertain about any of these instructions, contact your local health department's environmental health office for assistance.

Salvaging Food Items after a Flood

Due to the deluge of rain we've had across Virginia the past several months, many of you may have been working closely with your local Food Safety Specialist on the steps necessary in salvaging food items after a flood.

Not all food or beverage items can be saved after a flood. Discard any items in soft packaging or screw-top glass

bottles that may have been in contact with flood water. Sometimes, you may be able to salvage commercially canned goods in metal or rigid plastic containers; however the condition of the container is very important.

To salvage canned goods (in metal cans):

1. Record the following information from the label:
 - The common or usual name of the product.
 - The net contents of the container.
 - The name, address, and zip code of the distributor or manufacturer.
 - Any label codes from the original container.
 - The ingredients statement.
2. Remove the labels.
3. Wash in warm water and detergent.
4. Sanitize with a solution of one tablespoon of bleach in a gallon of water.
5. Re-label the container with the information you recorded above from the original label.

Discard canned goods if:

- The surface is rusted or pitted.
- The can is swollen or leaking.
- The can is badly creased or dented at the rims or seams.

Salvage items in plastic containers:

- Only if they have not been submerged in flood water or other liquids.
- Only if the product is not contaminated.
- Only if all traces of soil can be removed, and there is no soil on the cap or closure.
- Only if there is no evidence of rusting or pitting on the cap or closure, and the seal is completely intact.
- Only if the cap or crown is not dented in any way that affects the rim seal.
- Only if the container is not defective in any other obvious way.

Salvaging beverage items:

- You can salvage corked wine bottles sealed with foil or wax.
- You cannot salvage beverage containers with twist or screw tops.³

Always consult with your Food Safety Specialist if your firm has been affected by a flood, extended power outage, or other disaster.

Warning on Herbal Supplements

The Food and Drug Administration has warned the public not to consume Green Hornet or any other products claiming to provide “safe legal highs” or that are marketed as “street drug alternatives” by Cytotec Solutions Inc. out of Tampa, Florida. This company has sold products over the Internet and in stores as legal versions of street drugs. Other products included in this warning are Trip2Night, Invigorate II, Snuffadelic, Liquid Speed, Solar Water, Orange Butterfly, and Schoomz.

Green Hornet is a liquid product and is marketed as an herbal version of the illegal street drug “Ecstasy”. FDA became aware of bad side effects experienced by four teenagers who were rushed to the hospital after experiencing seizures, excessive heart rates, severe body rashes, and high blood pressure after having consumed the product.

FDA analyzed additional products manufactured and distributed by Cytotec Solutions Inc. and found the drug ephedrine and controlled substances GBL and GHB. Cytotec Solutions is no longer producing these products; however, the company is still under investigation and FDA is working to identify and address other distributors.

Please be aware of these products and do not offer them for sale in your retail stores. “FDA considers any product that is promoted as a street drug alternative to be an unapproved new drug and a misbranded drug marketed in violation of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. Additionally, any products containing undeclared active drug ingredients are in violation of the law.”⁴

Crack Down on Rodent Infestation

It's getting colder outside and mice are looking for shelter and food. Don't let your food establishment be vulnerable to rodent invasion.

Just because you have a pest control company helping you to control rodents, doesn't mean you don't have to be on the lookout as well. Take proper precautions to prevent rodent infestation.

- Seal foundation cracks.

- Holes created from tearing out old equipment and installing new should be filled and patched with rodent proof material.
- Survey your establishment for damage created by trucks hitting outer walls and repair the damage appropriately.
- Examine your loading dock doors. Be sure they close properly with no openings around the perimeter of the door. Keep these doors closed when they are not in use. Mice can climb walls.
- Don't attract rodents by allowing trash to accumulate around your establishment. Be sure trash receptacles are emptied regularly and are equipped with tight fitting lids which are kept closed.
- Survey your stock room. Look for evidence of rodents in corners of the room and around rodent favored products such as pet food, chips and snacks. Alert your pest control company immediately if you see evidence of rodents. Remember to never apply rodenticides on your own, unless you are certified.

You do not want a rodent problem in your firm. Not only is it a violation of the Virginia Food Laws, but it may also pose a health risk to you and your employees. Hantavirus, a virus carried and shed by rodents, is a form of adult respiratory disease syndrome. It was first reported in the U.S. in the spring of 1993. As of November 2003, 353 cases had been reported in the U.S. and 38% of the people died as a result of the infection. Exposure to Hantavirus occurs when a person breathes dust after cleaning rodent droppings, disturbs nests, or lives or works in rodent-infested settings. The best way to avoid being exposed to Hantavirus is to keep rodents out of and away from your establishment.⁵

Adoption of the FDA Model Food Code

The 2004 Virginia General Assembly passed legislation that went into effect July 1, 2004 that will allow the VDACS' Food Safety and Security Program to move forward with the adoption of the FDA Model Food Code and its supplemental documents.

We have already taken the initial steps in moving forward with the adoption process; however, complete adoption of the Code probably will not take effect until the spring of 2005. It will take the place of the Virginia Retail Food Regulations that are currently used in conjunction with the Virginia Food Laws to

regulate retail food stores. The adoption of the Code will not affect the regulations that pertain to food manufacturers and warehouses, nor will it affect the Virginia Food Laws.

The adoption of the Food Code will help to increase uniformity between the VDACS' Food Safety and Security Program and the Local Health Departments, as well as between Virginia and other states, many of whom have already adopted the Food Code or plan to adopt it in the future.

VFAB Announces Recall Workshops for the Food Industry

The Virginia Food and Beverage Association will be holding 3 one-day workshops to help food establishments develop, conduct, and implement product recall programs. The workshops are designed to be taken in sequence, but any one may be taken as a stand alone unit. Workshop dates are as follows: February 1, 2005 (Definitions and Development of a Recall Plan); May 17, 2005 (Recall Prevention); and August 2, 2005 (Managing a Recall). For more information,

contact: David Ottaway, david@ottaways.org or Anne Barker-Smith at abarker-smith@progressivegroupalliance.com

VDACS Food Security Website Update

The Chronicles of Food Protection newsletter is now available on the VDACS Food Security Web site at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/foodsafety/bioterrorism.html. Now you will be able to view previous and current issues of our newsletter at the click of a button. Feel free to print extra copies to distribute to your employees, as well. We encourage you to discuss relevant topics covered in the newsletter during your staff meetings and share important information with all those involved.

¹Bioterrorism and the Food Supply by Kevin Coleman. Directions Magazine, October 1, 2004. www.directionsmag.com/article.php?article_id=667

²Food Shipment Security: When Lemons Go Bad by Paul Rothman. August 1, 2004. http://govtsecurity.com/mag/food_shipment_security/

³Cleaning Up Your Business after a Flood, Minnesota Department of Health. www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/emergency/natural/floods/business.html

⁴Warning on Herbal 'Street Drug Alternatives', FDA Consumer Magazine, May-June 2004, page 3.

⁵Hantavirus Fact Sheet from the Washington State Department of Health. www.doh.wa.gov/topics/hanta.htm

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P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23218
Phone: 804/786-3520*

J. Carlton Courter, III
Commissioner

Dr. Donald Butts, Director
Division of Animal and
Food Industry Services

Food Safety and Security Program
foodprotection@vdacs.state.va.us

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